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CHILDREN OF THE BIBLE.

BY

ROBINA F. HARDY.

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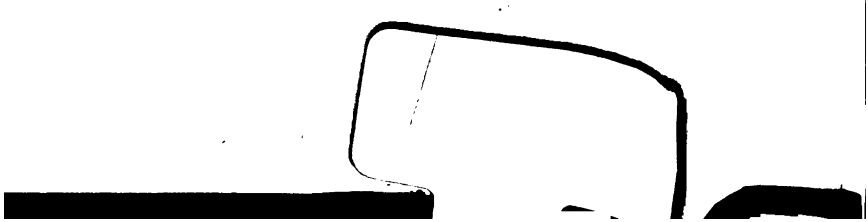


Sunday Reading Series.

THE CHILDREN OF THE BIBLE.

ELIJAH AND THE WIDOW. PAGE 55.

THE

CHILDREN OF THE BIBLE.

OLD TESTAMENT SERIES.

A Sunday Evening Book for the Young.

BY

ROBINA F. HARDY,

AUTHOR OF 'WHIN BLOOM;' 'NANNETTE'S NEW SHOES;
'JOCK HALLIDAY;' ETC.

SECOND THOUSAND.

EDINBURGH:
CRAWFORD & M'CABE, 15 QUEEN STREET.
1884.

O THOU whose infant feet were found
  Within Thy Father's shrine,
Whose years with changeless virtue crown'd,
  Were all alike divine.
Dependent on Thy bounteous breath,
  We seek Thy grace alone,
In Childhood, Manhood, Age, and Death,
  To keep us still Thine own.

HEBER.

CONTENTS.

NO.		PAGE
I.	ISHMAEL	9
II.	ISAAC	17
III.	JOSEPH	23
IV.	MOSES	29
V.	SAMUEL	37
VI.	DAVID	42
VII.	ABIJAH AND THE CHILDREN OF BETHEL	47
VIII.	THE BOY OF ZAREPHATH THE CHILD OF SHUNEM	54
IX.	JOASH: THE LITTLE HIDDEN PRINCE	62
X.	THE HEBREW CAPTIVES	70
XI.	THE LITTLE SYRIAN MAID	78
XII.	JOHN THE BAPTIST	86

THE

CHILDREN OF THE BIBLE.

No. I. ISHMAEL.

HAVE you ever watched some grand procession winding slowly along the streets of a great city? I think most of you have done so. Perhaps it was a royal or military pageant—a sovereign's visit, a hero's burial, or the arrival of some illustrious stranger in your town. And did there chance to be among its glittering ranks the slender forms and blooming faces of some children just such as yourselves in age and stature, however different in other circumstances? Then, I am very sure that your eyes were turned on them with peculiar eagerness—that again and again you pictured yourselves in their places, and tried hard to realise what their feelings must be. Nay! perhaps even older people, too, looked on them with fresh interest, for, in the good providence of our heavenly Father, childhood and youth bring their own attractions along with them, and seldom appeal in vain to the great heart of humanity.

Now, in that wonderful Book, God's own gift to man, is there not just such a stately procession ever moving on before our eyes, as we turn page after page, chapter after chapter, from the words of Moses, the servant of the Lord, to the final vision of the lonely exile in Patmos? Patriarch and prophet—warrior and king—heroes, saints, and martyrs—all take their places in that wondrous throng. Aye! but there are more homely and familiar figures too—gentle, kindly women—mothers such as yours or mine—shepherd lads, and village maidens, and little children, with their fresh faces and artless speech. You will find these last now and again appearing, from the time of the two brothers whose childhood began just outside the gates of the newly lost Eden, down to the days of those happier children who left their play in the streets of Jerusalem, and ran to welcome the Redeemer of the world, crying—'Hosanna to the Son of David!'

Shall we look for a little at these children as they pass, singly or in groups, and try to picture to ourselves their homes—their companions and their circumstances? The days in which they lived have long, long gone down the hurrying tide of time; but you have heard how little manners and customs change in the countries where they lived, for 'the unchanging East' is a familar and appropriate title. And then our human nature, with its hopes and fears—its joys and sorrows—and, alas! its failings too, that has changed still less. We may form, then, some idea, not altogether fanciful, of those children of ancient days, and learn from them some lessons not quite useless for our own.

Look, then, at yon fertile and far-stretching plain.

Tall, graceful palmtrees shade its silvery fountains; its clumps of oak and olive are festooned by the wild vine, with delicate leaves and fragrant clusters. A hundred tents upspear from out the foliage, and countless flocks and herds are safely pasturing around them. That is Beer-sheba, on the borders of the Philistines' land—the home of Abraham the Hebrew—'The man from the other side of the river,' as the people of the country have called him, for you remember that he came a pilgrim and a stranger from Ur of the Chaldees, far away on the other side of the mighty Euphrates. Now he is a wealthy and powerful man among them, for the God whom he worships and serves has given him all prosperity, as if to convince the poor ignorant Canaanites that Jehovah is the true God, and that 'blessed are all they that put their trust in Him.'

Many are the vassals and retainers of this wealthy Hebrew. A numerous household—or rather, a whole community owns him as its master. But to-day there are no signs of labour in field or sheep-fold. Only sounds of mirth and music are heard coming from the many tents, and from their wide enclosures, so softly shaded by fig-trees and acacia. For this day is a great day in Abraham's home—a day of feasting and rejoicing to all who belong to him.

And yet it is no birthday nor anniversary such as *we* should celebrate in this manner. The occasion is one which, among ourselves, passes unmarked and unheeded. But in every Israelite's home, even now, the day is held to be a day of family rejoicing, when the young child of the house may be fairly said to have passed the stage of helpless infancy, no longer dependent on a mother's

milk, but able to run about among brothers, sisters, or playmates, with something of their hardy independence. So it is with Isaac, the child of the Promise—the beloved of Abraham's old age. And Isaac is no ordinary child. It seems 'meet that they should make merry and rejoice!' Brighter by far than yon sunlight that sparkles on Beer-sheba's many fountains—wider than yon blue sky that spans from Moab's mist-clad mountains to the glittering waters of the Western Ocean, is the hope, given by God himself to the father of the faithful, and entwined with the existence of this little prattling two-years' old child! From him kings and nations are to spring—in him the whole earth is to be blessed! No wonder, then, that the eyes of all are bent on Isaac—that every one's blessing rests on him. Women coax him with their toys and trinkets, while great bearded men, more used to grapple with the bear and lion in their shepherd warfare, are vying now with each other in childlike gambols with the little hero of the day!

But who is that dark-eyed, swarthy lad lounging a little way apart with impatient, discontented air? A true son of the desert, and of its wild warfare, to all outward appearance, even as the word of prophecy, given at his birth, had described him. Ishmael, though indeed Abraham's elder son, is not the heir of the house—not the child of the Promise. Nor is there any injustice in his case, as he himself knows full well, regarding it in the light of the peculiar manners and customs of his time. Yet the lad's soul is full of bitterness and discontent to-day. What! This puny, feeble infant to come between him and his rights; to be the

centre of all honour and reverence, while he himself, born to be a mighty warrior and chief, is left here alone, neglected and despised!

Ishmael's longing eyes are turned towards the desert, far to the south, and lost in purple haze—the desert of which he has heard so much—where men live a life free and unfettered as the wild blasts that sweep its burning sands. Oh! for its glad, careless life, away from the galling restrictions of Abraham's camp—the wearisome service of his altar, and, above all, from that hateful jargon about the 'Child of the Promise!' What is Jehovah's promise to *him*, and why should he rejoice in it! And so Ishmael is losing, all this time, the gladness and brightness of the household holiday—magnifying his own little hardships, as we are apt to do ourselves, by brooding over them in sullen fancy. At last some words of bitter mockery—of spiteful jeering, escape him, as he hears some fresh outburst of rejoicing over his little brother. Perhaps he even mocked at that sacred promise concerning the boy! Ah! Ishmael has never tried to win that little brother's love—never sought to bind him to himself by those countless kindnesses of daily life, too trifling to be mentioned, which yet have often formed a golden chain, binding the hearts of brothers and sisters, scattered far and wide, but still united—a chain which time and sorrow and death itself could never break! We find no trace of any such link between these two brothers. We only read that they met once more, when together they laid the venerable form of Abraham in the sepulchre. Probably they met only with the solemn courtesies of their age and country, and with these formal ceremonies parted again and for ever!

Boys, are there any little children in your own home-circles? They are teazing and troublesome at times, I doubt not. Perhaps you think them spoiled and petted too—'far too much made of,' just as Ishmael thought of Isaac. Yet, bear with their infant years! Find time from your own sports to stop and play with them—to win their childish regard. Some day, if God spare them, that teazing little brother, that fretful baby-sister,—grown to good, true man and womanhood,—will look back with strong affection to the 'big brother' of long ago, who was never too big to play with them—never too busy to say a kindly word!

Alas! for poor Ishmael, his mocking words are heard—heard, too, by the jealous, watchful ears of Sarah. The lad's doom is sealed at once; to the desert shall he and his hated Egyptian mother depart. He must no longer remain under the same roof with Isaac!

And now let us turn to the desert—so different from that which Ishmael's romantic fancy had pictured it—trackless and homeless—withered and parched! Beer-sheba's day of feasting has not long gone by, but what a change in those two wanderers who had been present at its merry-making! Can that, indeed, be the lithe and blooming lad, stretched pale and death-like, with heaving breast and panting breath, under a juniper bush, the scanty growth of the wilderness! A bow-shot from the dying lad a woman kneels, in all the agony of a mother's grief. Thirst is as nothing to her—she has endured it often before—she would gladly endure it again, if only she might endure it for her boy! The sun shines in all his glory, as on the day of Isaac's

festival; but now it only glares on tracks of burning sand, or wastes of withered herbage. Oh! for some drops of Beer-sheba's sparkling water!

Hagar, who knows well the desert life, has searched long and eagerly before she yielded to despair. That empty leathern bottle, dry and shrivelled, has been her latest hope, and now every drop has been wrung from its crevices. Only one agonized prayer bursts from the mother's lips; no use now to ask for Ishmael's life, only 'let me not see the death of the child!' Yet water—the precious water that might save him, is really close at hand, could she but perceive it. Ah! remember! human eyes and human wisdom are not enough to guide us through the wilderness *we* have to travel!

But we read that 'God heard the voice of the lad.' Ishmael's faint moaning accents, as well as his mother's cry of agony, are heard on high. Those feeble voices, that could never reach to Beer-sheba's peaceful and plentiful tents, have yet power to pierce yon burning skies, and enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth! Jehovah listens to their cry, and sends help from out of Zion. Hagar's eyes taught by a new and better light, see the life-giving waters at last! Ishmael's life is spared—spared, too, to become one of blessing and honour; for it is written, even of his wild desert life, that 'God was with him.'

And now, have any of *you* wandered in spirit into some such dreary wilderness? Have sinful thoughts and words and actions, long continued in, caused you to feel shut out and separate from your heavenly Father's presence—from the peace and privileges of His

house? Oh! then, remember Ishmael! Remember how he faintly cried, and 'God heard the voice of the lad.' Let your cry also come before Him, and be very sure that, though it ascend from the desert of your sinful human heart, yet, through your Saviour's merits, it shall be heard and answered, and God will open your eyes to behold the fountain of the Water of Life.

No. II. ISAAC.

WE stand in the lonely mountain-land of Moriah, the freshness of early morning still breathing around us. The sun has scarcely risen, but his herald rays have chased away the shadows of the night, and wakened the birds in their leafy coverts, bidding them sing their morning song of praise. And the dew-drops glitter on the green sward like countless myriads of royal gems. But all is solitude here! From the purple summits of the north to the fringing forests of the south no human form and no human dwelling are to be seen.

But now a little band of pilgrims slowly emerges from the shadow of yon feathery palm trees. Nearer and nearer they come, until at last they pause just where the mountain-track grows steep and narrow. That old man, with the long silvery beard, seems leader of the party, and the tall, slender youth beside him may be his son or grandson; while the two strong men who follow with the laden ass are evidently servants. They busy themselves now with unlading the sleek, gentle creature, so handsome and well-cared for—so unlike his down-trodden and oppressed brethren in our day and country!

A pile of faggots is his burden; and that is laid on the shoulders of the lad, who begins with his aged sire to climb the hillside, while the servants throw themselves on the ground, to rest in true Eastern fashion, beside their four-footed companion. Ah! now we can surely read the story of these pilgrims! They have left their distant, busy homes, and sought this secluded spot, that in peace and quietness they may offer sacrifice to their God! Is it to one of those hideous idols of painted wood, or clumsy metal, that everywhere disfigure the fair land of Canaan?

No! Look again! We have seen that grave venerable man before! Surely this is Abraham the Hebrew, and that lad must be the little child of so many years ago, over whom the great household joy and rejoicing were made. A fine, handsome youth now, but there is a shade of melancholy—a touch of softness about the face, more suited to a girl's. You may be sure that Ishmael, the wild chieftain of the desert, would look with scorn on this kinsman, so unlike himself. Is it possible that this shy reserve and timid bearing may cover a moral courage—a power of endurance and self-sacrifice greater than any that Ishmael can boast? We shall see!

Meantime, we may rest assured that it is to no graven image—no senseless idol that Abraham will bend the knee. The Father of the Faithful—named to this day with reverence, alike by wandering Bedouin, by learned Jew, and Christian child, as the 'Friend of God'—will worship none other than Jehovah, the one true God who made heaven and earth! Slowly these two ascend the mountain-path—silently they gaze around

them on the lonely hills and quiet valleys. And still a deeper shadow gathers on Isaac's thoughtful brow, for one dark suspicion grows in his mind as he watches the troubled countenance of his father, and muses over the circumstances of this strange journey. 'A sacrifice!' Yes! all things save *one* are ready! The flints rattle in his father's trembling hand—the long knife glitters, cold and cruel, by his side—the faggots press on his own weary shoulder. But will Abraham offer to the Lord only some beast of prey or unclean bird! It should be a lamb from his own fold, the choicest and the best; but is there any such here in this strange land? Yes! Isaac's heart misgives him sorely! There is *one* such here!

Better, far better, the most terrible certainty than this cruel suspense.

'My father!' The words are falteringly said.

'Here am I, my son!'

And now the lad asks his bitter question—one which pierces sharper than a two-edged sword into his father's heart—'Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?' Abraham had with his own hands cleft that load of wood; with reverent hands, for it was for Jehovah's altar; and he had thought it a hard enough task for a father to do. As each faggot snapped, he had felt as if his own heart-strings, too, must break! But now he would go over all that painful task again rather than answer this one question! Yet ere long the answer comes. Words simple, yet sublime, rise to the patriarch's lips. Surely He who has often in later days stood by the martyr's fiery pile, and in the tyrant's gloomy dungeon, giving strength to His servants to be faithful even unto

death—surely He stands by Abraham while he utters these memorable words:—'My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt-offering!'

The long journey is over now. The pilgrims stand on the level summit of the mount, and there they have built with great stones from those dry ravines a rude altar to the Lord, and they have laid the wood in order on it. All is ready for the sacrifice!

Abraham's secret has been told—how we know not—and Isaac's last hope of life has died within him. He stands pale and motionless, looking over the fair earth on which his eyes must now close for ever. He thinks of the happy fields and tents of Beersheba, the home of his boyhood, that shall know him no more—of the mother who will look in vain for his return—of the glorious future once promised—the hope so bright and beautiful, now dying like some altar flame into cold, grey ashes!

But may he not fly? He who carried the ass' load so lightly up the steep hillside is no feeble child! A few quick bounds down that green valley and he is free—his father's aged arm is powerless to restrain him. Ah! but remember there are bonds more stringent than any that human hands can fashion,—the most perfect freedom is the service of God.

Isaac has been early trained in the fear of Jehovah—early taught to trust Him implicitly. He gave the life He would now recall. It was His to give—it is His to take again. Is it hard to die in this lone mountain—an unknown and forgotten death—to die, too, by his father's hand? Yes, very hard. Yet, be it so, for it is the will of God.

Is it hard to reconcile the promise with the command?

Yes, hard indeed! Yet that is not his to do; it is his only in simple faith, with child-like obedience to lie down and die. The last hour has come. The victim lies outstretched upon the altar—the sharp knife quivers at his breast—but, hark!

'A voice falls like a falling star'—

'Abraham! Abraham.'

And how joyful the new command—'Lay not thine hand upon the lad!' Quickly the cords are severed—the victim released. Father and son together kneel on the green turf, and pour out their grateful hearts to God. But what offering shall they render now to Him?

Jehovah-Jireh! The Lord will provide.

They turn, and lo! a stately mountain-goat plunging through yon thicket in his mad career. He is entangled by his curling horns, and easily made captive—a splendid creature—no unworthy offering even for this altar of the Lord.

We cannot stay now to view the sacrifice—to watch the circling wreaths ascending to heaven, or the altar-fires dying out among the lonely hills. But as we turn away we can think of the glad homeward journeying of that little band—of the gathered household at Beersheba, and the wondrous story told to them—that story which is to be handed down from generation to generation, from age to age, till in 'the place called Calvary,' the type shall be fulfilled, and a greater Father give His greater Son to die.

Shall I mock your everyday trials and my own by pointing to Isaac as an example? Hard enough they

are to bear sometimes, I know, but they are not like his. To some men and women it is indeed given to do the brave deeds of which Fame loves to tell; but with most of us it is the 'day of small things,' of little duties and common trials, trifling victories or failures. Yet do not despise them! Isaac's spirit of submission to his heavenly Father's will—his ready obedience to any duty, however hard, will not be found unsuited to these ordinary lives of ours. It will help to make duty light, trial harmless, and victory secure. And then, if the chance of greater things should ever come to any of us, do not doubt but that the old saying will be found true—'Faithful in little is faithful in much.'

No. III. JOSEPH.

THAT is a strange family-circle grouped in the pleasant valley of Hebron, where low green hills keep guard on either side, and the grey walls of a very ancient city catch the last glow of departing daylight. So many separate homesteads; yet these are not the dwellings of mere neighbours, but of brethren—'the sons of one man in the land of Canaan.' Ask that shepherd boy and he will point out to you the vineyards of Judah—the sheepfolds of Reuben—the banner of those fierce warriors Simeon and Levi—and more remote, the humbler quarters of Naphtali or Asher.

But he will tell you that many days ago these leaders left the valley with sons and servants, sheep and oxen, asses and camels, to seek, as usual at this season, fresh pastures among the northern plains. Only women and children, with some very old or very young retainers, remain here to mind the home-encampment as best they may.

And here he shows you one large central tent with richer coverings and loftier roof-tree than the rest—the dwelling of their patriarch-chief, the 'Jacob' of so many strange and interesting stories, of so varied and eventful a career, now resting in the bosom of his family—their high-priest at the altar of Jehovah, and

named with all reverence among them, as 'Israel,' 'a prince of God.'

Isaac still lives. Among the cool shadows of yon distant orange grove his peaceful home may be found. But it is in complete seclusion, shared only by a few faithful attendants, that he beguiles with saintly meditation, prayer and praise, the long hours of a helpless and blind old age. Esau, the red, reckless huntsman, lives far away, following the wild deer on his own rugged Mount Seir. And thus on Jacob, already an aged man, and returned from many wanderings, the patriarchal duties and privileges have devolved.

Jacob is seated at this quiet evening hour, in the wide doorway of his tent, watching the frolics of his two younger sons—one quite a little fellow, the other a tall stripling—as they dart in and out among the circling olive trees. These two are all that remain to him now of the Rachel so tenderly loved—so deeply mourned. Benjamin, whom she named with dying breath 'Benoni, son of my sorrow,' is now the light and life of the house, with his childish tricks and gambols. But Joseph, so much older and wiser, is able to share his father's graver thoughts and memories. There is a lonely pillar in the land of Ephratah, beside which the two boys have sometimes stood, while Joseph has spoken lovingly and reverently of the beautiful mother whom Benjamin cannot remember, and who lies buried there. With eager interest the little boy has listened; but the story has never saddened him. He has his father to care for him, and Joseph to play with him at eventide, and his young life is bright and happy.

But Jacob's pride is centred in the older boy. Brave, yet gentle—prudent, yet guileless—a certain romantic dreaminess his only fault—his fair, unsullied character stands out in pleasing contrast to the fierce passions and grovelling natures of his grown-up brethren —a star of hope amid their stormy skies.

Easy for a father's partiality to judge such a boy perfect. But in his very superiority perhaps there lurks a danger that the father does not see. Forced to be oftentimes a spy upon others—encouraged to disclose their questionable or wicked actions—may not Joseph sink unconsciously to a lower level than that he now seems destined for?

Well is it for us all indeed, that the rough school of life breaks in upon the soft nurture even of the best earthly home, shattering with its sharp lessons the crust of selfishness and vanity that the kindest hands have helped to gather round us there! And the Great Master knows just when and how to teach the lesson. Into that rough school Joseph is now to be sent.

We see him next at early morning leaving his Hebron home—a messenger to the absent brethren, charged soon to return with tidings of them. Some three days' journey lies before him, but to his lithe frame and active spirit that is a pleasure. His father has watched him treading his way through the flushing vineyards; and along the valley, with Benjamin by his side, but Joseph has now reached a point where they must lose sight of him. Aye, turn, and bid them yet once more farewell! Father and brother thou shalt indeed again behold, but not in this familiar scene! Not here, but in a far distant country, among people of a strange

aspect and foreign tongue—while between that day and this there flows a tide of years, of sorrow and trial, such as might well appal a stouter heart than thine!

We must leave Joseph to his three days' march by hill and dale, and his rest at night under the starlit sky, to find him again on the narrow but lovely plain of Shechem—Mount Ebal rising dark and stern upon his right, Gerizim's green slopes smiling on his left. Here, you know, in long after years, the serried ranks of Israel's many tribes shall stand, responding to the blessings and curses of the Law, as they are echoed from either summit, to die away at last in countless reverberations, but to live for ever in their hearts a sweet and solemn memory.

To-day the plain lies silent and deserted. Directed, however, by a chance traveller, Joseph wends his way some ten miles northward to Dothan, a wilderness tract of land on the great plain of Esdraelon. Here are his shepherd-brethren, and their keen eyes soon discern his approach, while the bright colours of his fated garment awake their old hostility. It has been thought that by this robe, with its crimson and purple dyes, foreshadowing the priestly dress of days to come, Jacob meant to declare his intention of investing this favourite son with the high-priesthood of the family, and hence the bitter feelings it occasioned in the hearts of his older brothers. Well has a poet said—

'A favourite has no friends!'

'Behold, this dreamer cometh!' With these contemptuous words the brethren gather more closely together in dark and dangerous conclave. Each has his own special reason for hating the innocent lad; and here,

in this lonely place, far away from all the better influences of home,—alike forgetful of their father and their God—they yield to the most inhuman impulse.

Let us turn from the sickening spectacle of men, made in the image of God, coldly plotting the death of a defenceless boy, and meanly bartering a brother's blood! 'Reuben tried to save him, and meant to restore him,' you say. It was a miserable effort, worthy only of its own signal failure.

Can you think, without a shudder, of that dark pit yawning in the wilderness—of the anguished cry that rings from out its gloom as the boy sinks deeper and deeper, losing sight of life, and light, and hope, haunted by the terrible faces of brethren more pitiless than the grim wolves that to-night may prowl around his carcase? Or, can you view without indignation and pity this draggled, blood-stained garment, destined by its false colouring to wring an aged father's heart, and bend his white hairs nearer to the grave?

I will not ask you to dwell on these dark pictures. Rather turn with me to the long coast-road leading down to Egypt's wealthy land, and watch that goodly array of merchantmen and laden camels. The tinkling bells—the fragrant spices wafted on the air—the hum of many voices—all speak of life and gladness again. *There* is our Hebrew boy, safe, though a captive, and bearing with him a treasure more precious than all their merchandise—the fear of his father's God!

Here we must bid Joseph farewell. Surely his boyhood ends with this dark day of trial. In sorrowful experience of life at least, he is henceforward a full-grown man.

Yet, while we watch with eager interest the last trace of that merchant caravan disappearing into the fiery glow of the Desert, it is difficult to resist one glance at a scene yet far distant in time, when a great multitude, escaped from Egyptian bondage, shall bring with them again the very form of Joseph. Not, indeed, the living, breathing form, now passing from our view, but a dry and shrivelled thing—a swathed and silent *mummy!*

Yes, Joseph died, and was embalmed with all the skill of Egypt. Centuries later he was buried among his own green fields of Shechem. Some day that grave may yet reveal its secret to European energy, and eyes such as ours may gaze on the still features of one who 'stood before Pharaoh!' With what thrilling interest —what strange emotion! And oh! if the long-sealed lips could speak to us—if we might ask what were the honours and rewards that most compensated Joseph for the years of his sore affliction—do you think they would tell us of the marble halls of the Pharaohs—of his storehouses bursting with golden grain—of the applause of a grateful people ever ringing in his ears? No, oh no! but of that moment when, with outstretched arms, he welcomed his erring brethren to his heart and home —not only because in that hour he was supremely happy, but because thenceforth he stood out to a dying world a type of its Redeemer—of Him who, amidst the darkness of Calvary and the sorrows of the Cross, would pray for His murderers that they might be forgiven.

No. IV. MOSES.

LEAVING for a time the quiet hills and valleys of Canaan, we turn with wondering eyes to busy populous Egypt—that strange land, rich in waving harvests and plenteous vegetation, richer still in treasures of art and science. Yonder rise the gloomy pyramids, those mighty wonders of the world; and yonder is the splendid Sun-Temple of ON, with its guardian obelisks, one of which is the 'Cleopatra's Needle,' we have heard so much of. Here flows the kingly NILE, between his level banks and emerald meadows, in somewhat sullen majesty. Those giant bulrushes stand like sentinels with uplifted spears, guarding his royal progress, while the great lotus or water-lily, broiders the hem of his robe with gorgeous blossoms and floating garlands.

Egypt is indeed a beautiful land, but 'the trail of the serpent is over it all.' Not one of its thousand temples ever echoed back the worship of the one true God; for countless multitudes of idols, from the glorious sun in heaven to the meanest reptile that crawls on earth, have long usurped His place. You will find here the 'sacred bull,' the 'sacred crocodile,' the 'sacred beetle,' and an immense number of equally 'sacred' objects. A strange perversion surely of man's noblest instinct and highest privilege!

It is by many spreading arms that the Nile reaches the sea at last, and here, on the most easterly of these stands the royal city of ZOAN. Tread lightly while we enter the palace, this massive pile of polished stone, with lofty columns, sculptured walls, and pavement of many-tinted marble. AAHMES,[1] the king or Pharaoh of to-day—'Child of the Sun' that word *Pharaoh* means —is not one to be rashly approached. One of a new race of sovereigns, he is haunted by the fear of conspiracy and rebellion; he is suspicious as well as cruel —a tyrant, and a coward too. With Aahmes justice means either torture or death, while mercy is an unknown or forgotten art. His servants tremble even to cross his banquet-hall; for let this golden cup be overturned, or that favourite dish prove unsavoury, the fault may quickly send them to the dungeon or the gibbet. How different from our own beloved sovereign —Victoria, the friend and mother of her people— their example in all holy living, and their hope even for the death-doomed felon! You will not forget, I am sure, that it is the religion of JESUS alone that, by its enlightening and elevating influence on our race, has long since rendered it impossible for such a tyrant as Aahmes ever to ascend the throne.

The worst suspicions of this new king were early fixed on the Hebrew race, so long quietly settled in Goshen, a fair and fertile part of his dominions. Highly favoured by the old race of Pharaohs, he was convinced they would plot rebellion against those who overthrew and succeeded them; and in truth these descendants of the patriarchs had multiplied into a numerous and

[1] See *Cassell's Bible Educator*, vol. i. p. 133.

formidable people. To expel them harshly from Egypt would have been a dangerous expedient. Aahmes determined rather to weaken and diminish them by excessive toil and hard usage, so as even to derive some profit from these dreaded neighbours—an idea which greatly pleased the royal mind. Heavy and oppressive labour was soon contrived. Long brick fields sweltered under the burning skies in ever-lengthening rows, and Pharaoh's treasure cities grew in gloomy magnitude. And year by year heavy hearts grew heavier, and weary frames bent nearer to the ground. Day by day the task was lengthened, and the lash came down with more cruel severity. Still, strangely enough, the victims increased in numbers—still Aahmes trembled in his gilded halls.

A harsher law is now enforced. Every son of this hated race is doomed to perish even in his infancy. *Then* surely Aahmes may find rest.

Oh! many a Hebrew mother stands by moonlight on the Nile's dark brink, listening in silent anguish to her baby's drowning cry! Perhaps they take some faint comfort from the thought that it would be cruel to wish them back to ceaseless toil and misery like their own—

> 'And what is life that we should moan,
> Why make we such ado?'

Let us look into the wretched huts of these poor brickmakers. Many a 'Simeon' and 'Benjamin' among them, as well as their Hebrew features, will remind you of the happier life of Canaan; but alas! the once prized traditions of their race seem to them now as idle dreams, and if they believe in the God of

their fathers at all, they think He has forgotten and forsaken them. Only a few faithful souls still grasp, with unfaltering faith, the great truths, that 'in all their afflictions He is afflicted, and that the angel of His presence will yet save them.' Among such are AMRAM and his wife JOCHEBED, of the tribe of Levi. To-night Jochebed kneels on the mud floor of their cottage, weaving with deft but wasted fingers a slender boat-shaped basket. Long strips of bulrush-stems are eagerly handed to her by Miriam, a bright-eyed girl of six or seven years, who holds a baby in her arms, while Aaron, a little boy of two or three years, sits on his father's knee, looking on in silent wonder.

Her task is completed. The little ark is thickly daubed with slime and pitch, and lined with the softest clothing Jochebed can gather from a scanty stock; and now the little infant is gently laid in that tiny bed, half cradle, half coffin. He is going away—this little light of their home—probably to return to them no more. Three months they have hidden him with ever-increasing difficulty, but Pharaoh's officers are on the scent now, and to-morrow all their lives may be forfeited. The mother's stratagem may save him a little longer; the Nile may rock this strange cradle gently on its breast, while by day Miriam watches its shelter among the tall reeds, and by night the toil-worn mother steals down to give her baby nourishment. That may go on for some weeks, and then—No! they will not think of what may happen *then*. Yet *one* terror Jochebed is spared. No crocodiles are found in this branch of the river, as they are in all the others. When her baby's last hour comes, he will only drift away seaward after all, and be lost in

that great ocean, which is the type of God's infinite mercy.

Do not let us forget the one ray of a better hope that still gleams for her across the Nile's dark waters. An inspired writer has told us that it is 'in faith' she lays her infant there. Faith in what? No special promise has been made about the boy. Faith in a covenant-keeping God, that He will yet redeem His people: for with her at least abides the chime of Joseph's dying words—'God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones out of Egypt.' And we know that

'When night is drearest,
Then dawn is nearest.'

Who can tell but that ere this feeble baby life is extinguished the hour of deliverance may have come? Yes, that hour is coming!

Do you think that the life of a princess must be a very happy one? Come with me and see. Not far from the palace resides a daughter of the royal house. It is probably in widowed state she dwells; and alone among her halls of splendour she whiles away the weary hours of enforced idleness. Sometimes she listens to the careless mirth and gossip of her maidens, and wishes she could throw aside the fetters of grandeur, and become like one of them. Or, she grows pale at hearing from their lips some new story of her royal kinsman's cruelty. Very often the quaint embroidery falls from her jewelled fingers, and her eyes glance mournfully across the broad river to the sunny pastures of Goshen lying beyond; then southward, where the long brick-fields send up their clouds of witness to the skies. Ah,

they are writing, in no doubtful hieroglyphics, the doom of her royal race!

Do not blame her for these listless hours. She cannot change her lot; and perhaps she is learning, through all its weariness, the lesson of patience she is meant to learn.

Courage, poor princess! God hath better things in store for thee!

Morning rises in all its fresh, calm loveliness. It is the hour for healthful exercise before the mantle of heat falls oppressively on all things. The princess and her maidens seek the cool banks of the river to enjoy a bath in some shady pool. The rosy flush of sunrise, the ripple of the silvery waters, the song of waking birds, all whisper to their hearts some faint chords of the unknown melodies of Faith and Hope and Charity.

Something half-hidden among the reeds catches the eye of the princess. What can it be? One of her hand-maidens steps into the water, and quickly brings to her feet the tiny basket so carefully fashioned by Jochebed. All gather round it with eager interest while the lid is removed. How beautiful are the Bible words in which the sequel is told! 'She saw the child; and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children."' No fear then that this daughter of the Pharaohs will order the cruel sentence regarding the child to be immediately carried out. All her true womanly nature would revolt against such an idea. No! let this little, bright-eyed girl run, as she so readily offers, to fetch a Hebrew nurse for the child. And let MOSES, as she will call him—a name meaning 'drawn out,'—grow up

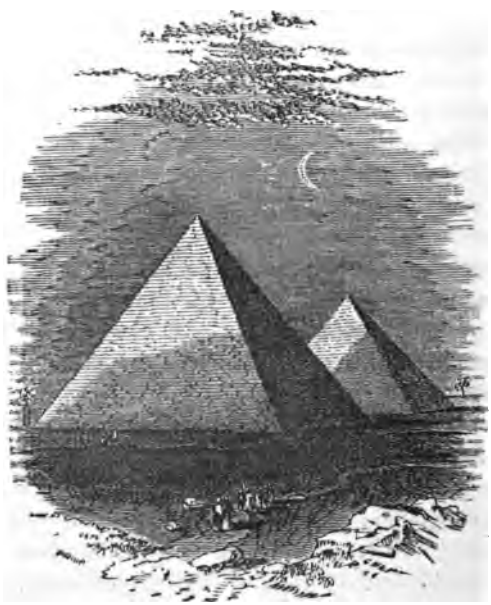
to be her very own—a new source of interest to her lonely life.

How fast Miriam runs along the banks of the river! How her little heart beats with rapture at the thought of what she has to tell her mother! And how quickly, too, that mother appears? She can leave the brickfield now, for it is the princess who has sent for her. With difficulty she conceals her own personal interest in the infant, and silently listens to the commands of the royal lady. She will take MOSES home, and rear him carefully till he is older, and able to remain without her at the palace. Meantime she will bring him from day to day to spend long hours there, and learn to love his adopted mother, who will be no longer weary, listless, unoccupied. Here we must leave them. We know that MOSES will grow up to be all, and more than all, they could wish. He will go by and by to the great Sun-Temple at ON, and become 'learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians;' but deeper down in his heart he will cherish the better lessons taught him by Amram and Jochebed—it may be in secret by the river's brink. And some day he will throw off the chains of Egypt, renounce the pride of royalty, and cast in his lot with the people of God, to be their long-expected deliverer. Probably before that day comes he will have closed the eyes of his adopted mother, and seen her body laid in one of those gloomy pyramids. Her gentle spirit will not be grieved by his desertion.

With grateful memory we look back on that compassionate princess, long lost among the shadows of Egyptian history. Her name is unknown on earth, but surely it is written in heaven. Knowing nothing of the

holier infancy yet to find shelter in Egypt, or the perfect life to be lived in Judea—nothing of all the gospel story *you* were taught so early—she yet cherished, amid the darkness of her pagan home, one faint forecasting ray of His character, who, taking Hebrew infants in His arms and blessing them, would say, 'Suffer the little children to come unto me.'

> 'In his frail ark of reeds—a feeble child
> Weeping he lay,—a princess pitying smiled;
> Then all unwitting from the Nile she drew
> Him, who dark Egypt's thraldom overthrew.'



No. V. SAMUEL.

THE mountain-town of Ramah, crowning the green slopes of its twin-summits, glows in the golden flush of sunset. Bright rays are playing round the latticed windows and vine-shaded porches of its cottage-homes, and glancing on the domes and towers of wealthier citizens. In one of these, Elkanah, a man of some importance in the little town—and what is better far, a good and upright man,—stands silently beside his gentle wife Hannah, while she watches for the last time the quiet slumber of her boy.

How often Hannah had longed to hear the pattering steps and merry voices of children in her own quiet rooms, as she heard them in Peninnah's busy home! And then the boon was given. Samuel—'the asked of God'—was born. But the mother's grateful heart had vowed that, ere long, he should be devoted to Jehovah's service; and now the hour of parting has come.

Through all his infant years she has watched him; and, like some pure, fragrant lily, this gift of God has grown, unfolding day by day fresh grace and loveliness. We can well believe that no angry passions dimmed the soul of him who was so early chosen to minister in God's holy presence;—that no froward self-will ever grieved the heart of her who was so soon to 'lend him to the Lord.'

And to-morrow's dawn must see the little household descending the hillside to mingle with the bands of pilgrims streaming on their way to the yearly festival at Shiloh. Let us go before, and meet them there.

Another sunrise has flushed all the eastern sky with rosy hue, and the olive gardens and mulberry groves around the tabernacle are bathed in dewy splendour. Before long the gates unclose, and priests in snowy vestments come forth to meet the weary pilgrims, while silver trumpets ring out their welcome on the balmy air. Eli, the venerable high-priest of Israel, is here dressed in gorgeous robes, around the hem of which are golden bells and pomegranates. His long white beard flows over a jewelled breastplate, on which the names of the twelve tribes are graven.

And now, kneeling at the old man's feet, a Hebrew mother offers to his arms her little bright-eyed boy, so pure and innocent in every look and feature, so fair and childlike in his white 'ephod'—a miniature of the priestly dress—and yet possessed of a grave, sweet dignity, well-befitting any servant of the sanctuary. It needs not Hannah's eager request—it needs not the little one's uplifted hands—to place him at once in Eli's kindly arms and loving heart.

Hannah's vow is fulfilled. Her son is 'lent unto Jehovah; so long as he liveth he shall be lent unto Him.' But, instead of tears and lamentations, her lips are opened in a song of praise and thanksgiving—her little white-robed boy, too, worshipping along with her and the great congregation, for the first time mingling his infant tones with the many voices of Israel.

And must Hannah go back to the quiet home at

Ramah, from which one bright presence has faded, even as the warm flush of sunset faded from the grey walls and terraced gardens of the mountain-town? Yes, but it will not be so lonely as she had fancied. In due time God will give her good recompense for this 'loan unto Him.' The boys and girls who gather round her there, it is true, will not be like Samuel; they will be ordinary children, with faults and failings just like your own, but you do not need to be told that they will be none the less dear to the mother's heart on that account.

Years have passed away. Little ministries, such as a child may render, have long been familiar to Samuel. To trim the golden lamps—to swing the burning censer —to open and close the tabernacle doors—these have been his daily duty and delight, and now he has grown to be as a much-loved son to the kindly old high-priest. Eli's failing powers lean more and more on Samuel from day to day, and bitterly disappointed in his own children, he gladly recognises, in this young disciple, a worthy successor to himself. Night falls around the curtained tent of Shiloh. The golden lamp there shines on through the darkness as if to tell of Him who 'keeps Israel, who slumbers not nor sleeps.' With the dawn that light will be extinguished, but it is not time for that; Samuel, whose duty it is to quench it, still slumbers on in the deep, sweet sleep of youth—and Eli, too, reposes not far off.

At this still hour a voice is heard — 'Samuel! Samuel!' The boy starts up. Surely Eli had called. He runs quickly to the old man's side. But no; it was not Eli's voice, and Samuel lies down again.

Again, and yet again, this incident is repeated; and

now Eli, sure that the LORD has spoken, teaches Samuel some fitting words of answer, and bids him silently wait what next may occur.

And once again that voice steals softly through the gloom—'Samuel! Samuel!' and the boy kneels reverently, with uplifted hands and bowed head, saying, as Eli taught him, 'Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth.'

How terrible is the message! Ruin is about to fall on the house of the good old man, who has been as a father to the little Levite. And will Samuel run, with all the heedless impatience of youth, to tell the bitter tidings? Oh, no! He lies silent till the morrow, thinking how best to spare the old man's feelings—how most gently to tell him what, sooner or later, must be told. Think of this bright example when you are called to wait on frail and aged relatives—

'Speak gently to the aged one—
Grieve not the care-worn heart;
The sands of life are nearly run,
Let them in peace depart.'

Samuel has opened the tabernacle doors, and gone about his usual duties before Eli asks him of the vision; but then he asks imperatively, and Samuel tells him all. Most beautiful and touching are the old man's words of resignation to the Divine will. When sorrow comes to us—as come it will to all—let us meet ours as Eli met his, and say—'It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth to Him good.'

I have pointed you to Samuel's example in one instance, and it may be, I should go further in that direction. Wiser teachers than I will tell you to imitate him in his early consecration. And yet, as I gaze on

the picture of that pure and holy childhood, and watch it merging into a life so sorrowful and so sublime, I shrink from the task, and would rather turn with you to those other children in the home at Ramah—the Miriam and Rachel—the Simeon, Eleazar and Benjamin, whose ordinary characters and destinies were so much more like our own. They loved, when evening shadows fell around their mountain-home, to think of that elder brother dwelling within the holy courts of Shiloh, even then offering up incense and oblation for them and for all Israel. And we too, like them, have an Elder Brother passed within the veil, not of an earthly Shiloh, but of the heavenly Jerusalem: and there He ever liveth to make intercession for us—JESUS our Prophet, Priest, and King.

No. VI. DAVID.

BETHLEHEM! How many pictures rise before us at the sound of that familiar name! Its terraced slopes, shaded by fig-tree and olive, and crowned by time-worn walls—its grassy plains and fertile fields stretching far away towards the wilderness-country of Judea. Here Rachel died and was buried—here Ruth gleaned among the yellow sheaves. On these upland slopes the favoured shepherds 'watched their flocks by night,' and through these very skies once rang the angel's song—'Glory to God in the highest.' It was to this grey-walled town that the star-guided Magi came to pour their costly offerings at the infant Saviour's feet; and through its narrow streets thronged the rude soldiery of Herod, their swords red and dripping with the blood of the martyred innocents.

But I wish you to look more closely at another scene—one belonging to the earliest days of Hebrew monarchy. Saul, the first king, has already been rejected by the God whom he would not obey, and in his palace at Gibeah becomes a prey to fitful frenzy or dark despondency. Samuel mourns over him in his lonely house at Ramah, and comes no more to visit him, while the bewildered people hardly know where now to look for guidance either in peace or war.

There is a stir in the little town of Bethlehem to-day. Its gates are thrown wide open, and its elders go forth in procession to meet an honoured guest. The great prophet himself approaches, followed by a train of Levites, who lead with them a snow-white heifer, spotless and unblemished, meet for the altar of the Lord. There are troubled looks upon the brows of Bethlehem's chiefs —for 'conscience makes cowards of us all'—and it may be that Samuel comes in righteous indignation to remind them of some unexpiated crime.

But Samuel greets them with words of peace. He summons them to a glad yet solemn festival, and would have them go now and prepare themselves for the ceremony. They will meet him afterwards at the high place of their city—that green hill-side softly shadowed by leafy sycamores, but with a level summit, lying open to the blue unclouded sky.

But one word more has been whispered in the ear of one of the elders—a word that kindles high hope in his heart. Jesse, the Ephrathite, is an old citizen, much esteemed in Bethlehem as the grandson of Boaz and Ruth, and the father of some brave sons who have followed Saul to the battle, and won their laurels on many a field of fame. And on one of these sons Samuel has come to pour the consecrating oil—to anoint him king over Israel. It is a startling announcement, but soon Jesse reflects, with all a father's pride, that there is none among the many thousands of Israel more stately and king-like than his own first-born Eliab—more prudent and skilful than Shammah—more ardent and generous than Abinadab. On one of these three the choice must doubtless fall; yet he will bid his younger

sons be present too, that they may witness their brother's triumph. Only David—the youngest—the shepherd boy—need not be recalled from the field. So reasons Jesse, and so we often reason too, forgetting that our greatest men may be the least—our least men the greatest—in the eyes of the Lord.

Let us look for a moment at this David, the shepherd boy. Do not imagine that his life is one free, careless holiday, spent in guiding his sheep from one green pasture to another, by murmuring stream or flowery glade. There are such scenes, it is true, and David has a heart to feel all their beauty; but there are graver features in this shepherd-life. From yonder wilderness, stretching away in tangled thorny mazes to the shores of the Dead Sea, there prowl forth at times ravenous beasts of prey to snatch some wanderer from the scattered flock. And once at least, on such an occasion, David's courage has been proved. No human help was near; but, breathing an earnest prayer for help from the God of Israel, the dauntless boy cast himself on the foe, and bravely smote him to the earth with one fell blow of his gnarled truncheon, so rescuing, at the peril of his life, the charge committed to his care! And did he forget, in the hour of his victory, from whom that victory came? No! You remember how he could calmly face another danger with the words of simple trust: 'THE LORD who delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.'

Meantime the sacrifice has been offered on the high place of Bethlehem. The white heifer has been slain

and laid upon the altar; the smoke ascends in curling wreaths to heaven, and the gathered people wait, with eager expectancy, the sacred feast to which they have been called. It is at this moment that Jesse causes his three stalwart sons to pass in review before Samuel, and as the towering height of Eliab rises to view the aged prophet exclaims—'Surely the LORD'S anointed is before Him.' But a VOICE unheard by others whispers in his heart: 'Look not upon him—I have refused him.' And as Shammah and Abinadab, too, retire, the anxious father hears the same chilling sentence—'Neither hath the LORD chosen this.'

Gloom sits on Jesse's brow—his high hopes are falling fast; but he has still four promising youths to present, and one by one they follow in their brethren's steps, alas! only to share in their rejection. And Jesse's anger fiercely burns. Surely the prophet is mistaken, he thinks. He is in his dotage perhaps, and can no longer rightly discern the voice of Jehovah.

'Are here all thy sons?' The question startles him out of his bitter musings. 'Aye! all save one—the youngest—a mere boy. What need of him to add another disappointment?'

'Send and fetch him; for we will not sit down till he come hither.'

So the feast is delayed—the whole city kept waiting till this shepherd lad is found. At last he comes, flushed with excitement, breathless with haste, ruddy and fair-haired—'of a beautiful countenance and goodly to look to.' And before him rises up the venerable Judge of Israel, hearing that mysterious voice thrilling through his heart: 'Arise, anoint him; for this is he.'

From his golden horn the consecrating oil is poured on the youth's bended head, and David is solemnly set apart to the kingly office. And yet it would seem that his full dignity is not now revealed to the boy. He only knows that, in some special and sacred manner, he is devoted to the service of the LORD. For long years must elapse before Saul's throne shall be actually vacant, or David old enough and wise enough to fill it. He must go back to his lowly shepherd-life, and learn many a hard lesson there, but he will carry with him the memory of that solemn consecration, and who can doubt that it will help to purify and elevate the boy's whole character, and to make him, in after years, 'the man after God's own heart.'

Children, are you thinking that, in all this, David is at least no example for *you*—that no kingly honours —no consecrating oil—can ever be *your* portion? True; and yet was there not a day in each of your bye-gone histories—though one that you cannot remember—when you were carried to the baptismal font, where Christ's minister received you in His thrice holy name; when parents or guardians promised for you that henceforth you would be His faithful followers and servants?

And has the thought of this any effect on your present lives and characters? If not, begin this day to consider what that solemn service meant. The grace of God was promised to you then, if only you should claim it—grace to keep your feet from falling—grace to present you faultless before the throne. Oh, then, remember that the blame must be your own if you come short of a destiny higher far than that of earthly monarch; and are not, now and evermore, children of God and heirs of glory!

No. VII. ABIJAH AND THE CHILDREN OF BETHEL.

'IN time past God spake unto the fathers by the prophets.' One by one these lamps of God were lighted, till, in the fulness of time, Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, dawned upon a dark and sinful world; and though Israel might not always listen to the lofty strains of Isaiah or the splendid visions of Ezekiel, there was seldom wanting some humbler but as faithful servant of the Lord to whom they might turn for counsel or guidance.

One of these less-famed prophets was Ahijah, the Shilonite, so called as being an inhabitant of Shiloh, a spot ever held sacred since the ark of God had long rested there. It was in the declining days of Solomon's reign that Ahijah entered on his ministry, and his prophetic mind was burdened with the foresight of coming doom. It was he, you remember, who met the rough, reckless soldier Jeroboam in the fields, and who, rending his new robe in pieces, told the aspiring but unknown warrior that even so the fair kingdom of David would soon be rent in pieces, and he himself made king over the greater part.

It is at a later scene in this prophet's life that I wish you to look. Ahijah is now an aged man, helpless and blind. He has lived to see his country torn asunder,

and plunged into all the horrors of civil war; he has seen the wicked reigns both of Rehoboam and Jeroboam; the golden calves erected at Dan and Bethel; and, saddest sight of all, the Temple of the Lord rifled by the unhallowed hand of Shishak, king of Egypt. And now his eyes are for ever veiled in darkness, and to-day he sits alone in his chamber, musing, it may be, on his own dark and evil days, and those of his beloved land, but perhaps, too, on that better country 'that hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of the LORD doth lighten it.' There is a light step on the threshold, a timid hand at the door; but no voice comes to tell who seeks admission. It is a woman's form that stands trembling there—closely veiled and dressed in peasant garb. She carries a light burden in her hand, evidently a present for the man of God; some home-made cakes, some honey from the garden hive—such an offering as the country people are used to bring when they seek his counsel.

But though the aged prophet's eyes are dim, his mind is illumined by the Spirit of the LORD, and he at once recognises in this would-be peasant no other than the queen of Israel. How his greeting startles her! 'Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam. Why feignest thou thyself to be another?'

The useless disguise is dropped, and the unhappy queen throws herself at the prophet's feet. No need even to tell her errand now, for Ahijah knows all. And then in trembling silence she listens to the awful judgment pronounced by him against her husband and his sinful race. Ah! there is one word that will ring for ever in her ears: 'Arise, get thee to thine house; and

when thy feet enter into the city *the child shall die.*' And one word more that seems to mock her misery: 'For *he* only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, *because* in him there is found some good thing toward Jehovah, the God of Israel.'

Strange sentence! Inexplicable reason! Little need, thinks the heart-broken mother, to tell *her* that her boy is nobler and better than all his father's race. *She* knows well how good and gentle and true he is. But oh! why must the gloomy sepulchre close over him so early? Why is it the fairest and the best that must perish—and that, too, just *because* he is good?

It is a hard question, and one that is often asked, 'Why are these blossoms of promise scattered at the grave's mouth—flowers that might have made our earth an Eden?'

Prophet lips are silent here, but on the Christian's ear there falls an echo from the far-off garden of the Lord where these gathered flowers have been planted again—a still small voice that says, 'He doeth all things well.'

The queen has reached her palace-home of Tirzah. With slow and lingering steps she has approached its gilded towers, well knowing that her foot-fall at the city gate is the death-knell of her boy. But at last she stands face to face with the poor craven king who had not dared to face the prophet of that God whom he has dishonoured and forsaken, but whose help he was fain to seek when golden calves and lying priests had failed. She tells him all: and then together they turn to look for the last time on the still features and lifeless form of their son ere he be for ever buried from their sight.

What was it that made this young prince ABIJAH

pleasing in the eyes of the LORD? Jewish traditions tell us that he 'remembered his Creator in the days of his youth,' and would not bend the knee to his father's idols. We know assuredly, however, that He who looketh on the heart saw in this child of an evil and idolatrous house one clothed in a righteousness not his own—redeemed by that Saviour who was yet to die for him. ABIJAH was indeed a rose among thorns; and while the thorns were left to be devoured by the anger of the LORD, the rose was plucked by His loving hand.

Another scene from prophet times may help to throw some light on this one. It is a darker and sadder picture by far. ELISHA, once the servant and disciple of ELIJAH, has seen his master taken from him by the fiery chariot of heaven. Alone and dejected he turns to face the duties that now devolve upon him. Elijah's mantle has indeed fallen on him with its wonder-working power, but the strong spirit of the great Master is gone, and how shall Elisha fill his place? He must go forward, however, in the path of duty, even though it be with faint heart and faltering steps.

The various schools of the prophets must be visited in order: and among the first of these is Bethel, a name very familiar to us all—as 'the house of God'—the place of Jacob's dream. Alas! it is no longer a fit spot for the angels of God to ascend and descend upon earth. Bethel has long been one of the centres of Jeroboam's idolatrous worship—the shrine of one of his golden calves; and the unhallowed rites practised there have sunk the people into vice and degradation. Look at those young lads who come thronging from the city gates to meet Elisha, trooping down the rocky pathway

with wild outcries and mocking gestures! Young indeed in years, but old in evil! Born and brought up among unholy words and sights and deeds, what to them is this grave austere prophet of Jehovah? Only a poor and friendless stranger, at whose expense they may make merry for an idle hour.

You have seen some such cowardly, malicious attack. Perhaps you have even joined other boys or girls in 'making a fool' of a passer by, or 'taking your fun' off some half-witted being. It may be so; but I am very sure that conscience told you all the time that the 'fools' were on the other side; and that the 'fun' gained by so wounding a creature stricken of God was little worth the name.

But these unhappy children of Bethel have perhaps another meaning in their words—a hidden sting in their mockery. For they have heard the wondrous story of Elijah's ascension, and with blasphemous jesting they call to his forsaken follower, 'And thou, too, go up! Go up, thou bald-head!' Little does Elisha care for what they say of himself, but he *does* care for the honour of his Master—for the glory of his God. And it is time that sharp judgment should fall on the guilty city which has reared such sons, lest its sin should sweep like a pestilence over the fair land of Israel. Elisha listens to the hoarse mingling voices of these depraved creatures, and then slowly descends the steep path a little way.

Silently he stands gazing into the blue, cloudless sky overhead, as if asking counsel from on high; *then*—! words of doom burst from his lips, and *he curses them in the name of the Lord!*

At once a hideous roar resounds throughout the gloomy forest that clothes the deep ravine leading to the Jordan. There is a crashing of boughs—a trampling of sod—and there rush forth two terrible she-bears with glaring eyes and white gleaming tusks, freshly robbed of their young and fierce with days of hunger.

It is a wild scene of carnage that follows. Flight and terror—agony and despair—torture and death—all are crowded into a few brief minutes. And when to-morrow's sun shall shine on the rock-strewn valley of Bethel, only some whitening bones shall tell of the fair forms and blooming faces that were many a mother's pride and many a father's hope!

And now look back for a moment to the weeping queen of Jeroboam, and the silent corpse of her innocent boy. Can you not count them happy now? Happy child, who passed from life here to life in heaven—happy mother, who could think of him as 'one whom God hath taken!'

Have the days of Bethel quite gone by? We live in Christian lands and gospel times: and yet how often words of coarse profanity grate upon our ears! You cannot choose but hear them, whether your home be in crowded city or quiet village. But, remember, you *can* choose that they shall find no place in your heart or on your lips. I know well that to most children this counsel is unnecessary: thank God it is so! But there are others, alas! to whom the swearer's voice is as familiar as the very air they breathe; and there are little ones among our narrow wynds and miry closes, whose infant lips are polluted with the language of hell long before their minds can understand its meaning.

Sunday scholars, you can do much to check this poisonous tide. You can do what ministers and missionaries—books and sermons—cannot do. Show your abhorrence of all profanity at least by a grave silence, if not by actual reproof. Raise the tone of your companions' conversation by keeping your own free from every taint; and if, at any time, familiarity with the swearer's voice threatens to cloud your sense of the deadly evil in his words, oh! remember he is speaking the language of a dark, dark country which, God forbid we should ever see—even that place where 'the mercy of the Lord is clean gone for ever'

No. VIII. THE BOY OF ZAREPHATH. THE CHILD OF SHUNEM.

ARE there any two names of Scripture history more closely united in our minds than those of Elijah and Elisha? No sooner does the prophet of Carmel rise before us in his stern grandeur, than our thoughts naturally fall on the more shadowy and subordinate disciple, even as the mantle of his great master fell on him when chariot of fire and wings of the whirlwind were bearing Elijah from his sight.

Both lived under the evil dominion of the house of Ahab and Jezebel:—both were the fearless messengers of Divine wrath and coming judgment. Do you think that from men such as these—so terrible in word and aspect—so associated with deeds of righteous vengeance—children such as you must ever have shrunk in awe? It was not so. Glance for a moment at two incidents in their respective lives.

Elijah is enduring with silent fortitude the judgment which he had himself foretold. The heavens are as brass—the earth as iron; no rain nor dew appears, and famine desolates the guilty land. The prophet has been sent by God to the sea-coast between Tyre and Sidon, and arrives at Zarephath, a village of Phœnicia, far beyond the boundaries of his own loved Israel. But

here, too, the famine reigns, and is it likely that among starving worshippers of Baal and Ashtaroth, this man of God will find a home and a welcome? He knows not, and heeds not, for he has learned to trust that God 'who feeds the ravens.' And yet, even in this unlikely spot his soul is cheered by meeting with a true daughter of Israel, long exiled from her father's land, but still strong in faith in her father's God. She is poor indeed as to worldly wealth, worn and emaciated, ready to perish from hunger. She is gathering some bits of drift-wood from the lonely shore, that she and her boy may kindle their last fire—eat their last meal—and then lie down in their last slumber together. Surely these two will need all they have for themselves; they can have nothing to spare for the stranger! Ah! but at Elijah's calm word of assurance, 'Thus saith the Lord,' this exile of Israel feels all her dying faith revive. Gladly will she share her last morsel with the servant of Jehovah. But can Elijah take from her what she can so ill spare? Yes, for he knows that, in receiving the servant she receives the Master too, and that 'in the breaking of bread He will be made known.'

And so it proves. Days, weeks, and months pass on, and still the little household lives on in simple trust; the barrel of meal wastes not—the cruse of oil fails not—and ere long the better times will come. Alas! there is another trial in store for them before that! The child of the house falls sick; he droops and languishes, and all they can do for him is done in vain! Ere long the boy lies cold and motionless in that sea-beat cottage-home, and his widowed mother cares no longer for the

hoarded meal and the treasured oil, for she is childless and forsaken. How her silent grief touches the heart of the prophet. And he, too, has loved the merry, light-hearted boy who brightened the lonely life of Zarephath. How tenderly he lifts the dead child from his mother's arms, and carries it to his own narrow chamber! With what agony of grief, what fervour of faith he throws himself upon the lifeless form, entreating the God of Israel to be their help in this bitter hour, and even to bring back the fluttering spirit from the very portals of the world beyond!

That prayer is heard and answered. The breast heaves once more—the colour flushes over the waxen cheek—the eyes unclose—the drooping head is lifted. And now the prophet restores him to his mother, with the joyful words, 'Thy son liveth!'

Children, had you been present at this scene, you would not *then* have shrunk in terror from Elijah, but like the little boy of Zarephath, you would have felt safe and happy in his kindly presence.

And now turn to that fair and pleasant mansion overlooking the quiet village of Shunem. No misery pines within its stately walls—no famine stalks through yon rich harvest fields that encircle them as with a golden girdle. And that quaint chamber on the battlemented roof;—ah! that has its own story to tell of kindly hearts and busy hands within. For long ago there came and went oftentimes by Shunem a faithful servant of the Lord, and here they made him rest on the long march to Carmel or to Gilgal. The good man never went away without leaving some blessing behind him—some word of holy counsel or fervent prayer. No

one valued his visits more than the mistress of the house, and so it occurred to her to build for the prophet this little chamber on the wall. Quickly her servants did her bidding; and soon the light plastered sides arose with the graceful vines trained over them, and the bright windows glancing in the sunlight. And then the lady's own hands set everything in order within—the simple couch—the chair—the table—the candlestick. It was all ready; and ere long Elisha came. Gehazi, his servant, too came with him,—Gehazi, whose unhappy story you know so well. He would sleep on the thick mat at his master's door, as Oriental slaves are wont to do. And now these two became not passing strangers, but abiding guests from time to time; and the wealthy home grew brighter and happier because its life grew purer and holier as the days went on.

How could Elisha recompense all this kindness? He had access to the palace at Jezreel—influence with the great men of Jehoram's court. And one morning, at his bidding, the lady of Shunem came. 'What wouldst thou? To be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?' How simple, and yet how dignified was her reply—'I dwell among mine own people.' Words few but eloquent! Volumes in praise of the dear home she loved so well—the fair land she called her own—the true hearts around her—would yet have left something unsaid; but Elisha could recognise in this brief answer the language of a heart satisfied and at rest; he will trouble her no more with dreams of the ivory palace and the glittering court, but leave her to dwell in peace 'among her own people.'

And yet a boon from God was given. The full cup

was filled yet higher. A son was born to the old house of Shunem—an heir to the broad lands around it.

Long years have passed, and to-day the yellow corn is falling fast upon the fields of Shunem, while a hundred sickles glitter in the fierce sunlight. There are no idlers in the harvest field—even the old master himself lends a hand. Perhaps he is just too much taken up with the splendid crops, and the countless sheaves and the groaning garners; for, when a childish cry, 'My head! my head!' comes teasingly upon his ear at the most busy moment of that busy day, he shows no signs of parental anxiety, asks no eager question of alarm, but only gives the hurried command, yet doubtless the best he could have given—'Carry him to his mother.' Then one strong reaper lifts the little fellow in his arms, and hastens with him to the house, eager to return to his harvest work again. Ah! but there is *one* at Shunem who has time to tend the little sufferer—one who counts his flaxen hair more precious than all the golden grain. On her breast he may rest his flushed cheek and aching brow—in her ear he may tell all his tale of trouble.

But only 'till noon!' When that hour comes the lady of Shunem sits alone in her deserted castle, still clasping the little form that is so beautiful in her eyes, but it is cold and silent now, and she knows that her child is dead. He is dead; but hope and faith still live in the mother's heart. God gave this child—miraculously gave him; it is as easy for Him to give him back again from the dead. She makes no useless wailing, summons no one to her aid; but herself carries the waxen form up to the quaint chamber on the

roof, and lays it in that peaceful sanctuary—not in despair, but in lowly trust. The quiet room is her most holy place, because still hallowed by the vanished presence of the man of God. And it is right for her, right for every mother to bring her little one as near to God as she may—in life, in death, to confide such to His holy keeping.

And now see her spurring her wearied ass along the steep mountain-road that leads to Carmel. The servant at her side would fain bring him to an easier pace, but she forbids him. 'Drive, and go forward! Slack not for me, except I bid thee.' At last, from Carmel's lonely height, Elisha perceives her, and already Gehazi is sent running swiftly to meet her. What urgent need brings her at such a time and in such haste? Has some calamity befallen herself, her husband, or her child? Gehazi eagerly asks these questions, but few-worded as ever, strong in faith as before, the lady of Shunem only answers, 'It is well!'

But now, kneeling at Elisha's feet, the full soul pours forth its sorrow, and meets with ready sympathy. The prophet hastens to command his servant Gehazi to go in his name, and with his staff, to Shunem and call back the spirit of the child. It may be that the LORD will yet be gracious unto her. Eager to help, and proud of his commission, Gehazi starts at once, but not in staff nor in servant will the anxious mother trust. As if she knew that only the 'effectual fervent prayer of a *righteous* man availeth,' she cries with resistless entreaty, 'As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.'

It was well that Elisha yielded to her prayer; for,

as they approach Shunem, they meet Gehazi returning baffled and dejected, the useless staff in his hands, no word of hope on his lips. The most trying hour of all has come. Elisha has closed the door of his chamber on himself and the little sleeper. In the lonely house below the mother crouches in unutterable suspense. She hears no sound but the occasional footfall of the prophet overhead, and through the open window the hum of many voices borne faintly on the breeze, coming from the busy harvest-fields, and telling of a life, oh! so different from her own!

There is a step on the little staircase, and Elisha descends. Alas! with no message of joy—only to pace up and down the gravelled court-yard, his strong soul wrestling, as it were, in prayer.

That prayer is heard. Elisha seeks the chamber of the dead once more, and ere long the trembling woman is summoned to his presence, to hear from his lips the joyful command, 'Take thy son.' Yes, it is her *son!* No longer a cold waxen image—beautiful only with the beauty of death, but a living, breathing form, bright with the radiance of an immortal soul.

You do not wonder that she falls at Elisha's feet in adoring gratitude—but perhaps you *do* wonder that no flood of thankful words—even the most ordinary ones—bursts from her lips. And yet I think we can all feel that her's was a case where no common words would do. She was one of those, too, who say least just where they feel most deeply. May we try to copy her meek, quiet spirit of submission, alike when joy brightens on our way and when sorrow shrouds our skies, and saying only, 'It is well!'

Children, let me ask you once more, while the companion stories of Zarephath and Shunem remain in your memories, if you regard only with fear these prophets of Israel? Great and terrible were their deeds, it is true, stern and awful their messages of doom to a guilty nation; but they were men who loved to bind the broken heart and dry the mourner's tears,—men to whom widows and orphans—friendless and fatherless—all came in their hour of sorrow. And of either of them, as of the 'Village Parson,' so beautifully drawn by an English poet, it might have been said;

> 'E'en children followed with endearing wile,
> And plucked his gown to share the good man's smile.'

No. IX. JOASH: THE LITTLE HIDDEN PRINCE.

IT is a dark and blood-stained page of Hebrew history that records the history of JOASH, the little hidden prince of Judah. Before we watch the infant hurried to his strange hiding-place, let us cast one backward glance over the troublous times into which he was born.

It was an evil day on which his grandfather Jehoram sought a wife among the godless revelries of Ahab's court. In Judah God still 'gave a light for David's sake,' and there the Temple reared its hallowed walls, the Paschal lamb was slain, the holy feasts were kept. But the rival kingdom of Israel was now deeply sunk in the mire of idolatry; on her green mountains the fierce fires of Baal glowed—her groves and valleys resounded with songs of praise to Ashtaroth.

It was among scenes like these, and with the example of parents so cruel and depraved as Ahab and Jezebel before her eyes, that ATHALIAH had grown up. So it is little wonder that, arriving at her new home, the palace of Jerusalem, she gave full rein to a tyrannical nature, and sought to overthrow the worship of Jehovah, and to plant on its ruins one more familiar and pleasing in her own sight. Prompt, resolute, and fearless—possessed of many queenly properties, and probably of much royal grace and beauty, Athaliah might have

proved a benefactress to her husband's kingdom. But, alas! her character was formed, and formed for evil! Strife and slaughter—disappointment and revenge—a violent and a bloody death, all lay before her.

Try to remember that *your* character is being formed *now;* and that as you are sowing here, you must hereafter reap!

The unhappy fate of her husband and his kingdom might have sufficed to warn Athaliah from her rebellious path. Edom and Libuah—southern tributaries—besides many of his own people, revolted from Jehoram's yoke, since he had forsaken the God of his fathers, and broken faith with his subjects. Philistine and Arabian whetted their swords against him and made havoc of his kingdom, carrying most of his children away captive. Plague and pestilence overswept the fair plains of Judah, leaving death and desolation behind them, and at last the unhappy monarch closed his eyes on these scenes of misery, worn out by sore and loathsome sickness. Unloved, unregretted, Jehoram died—or in the words of Scripture, 'departed without being desired.'

Athaliah at once seized the sceptre of Judah in the name of her son Ahaziah, a weak, pleasure-loving prince, who gladly left the cares of government to her. These were no hindrance to the bold, ambitious woman, who was ready even to

'Wade through slaughter to a throne.'

But her own evil days were coming. Ahaziah was on a visit to his mother's brother, the king of Israel, when the fierce insurrection of Jehu broke out, and the avenger's sword, while it drank the blood of Jezebel

and her son, and hewed down the altars and groves of Baal, spared not the stranger prince, so nearly allied to Ahab's guilty race. In that sudden revolution Athaliah lost mother, brother, and son, besides many other relatives and friends. Probably, too, the first news of these disasters reached her when the lifeless body of Ahaziah was carried home in trembling haste to Jerusalem by the servants who had followed their royal master to Jezreel. Little they cared for that worthless prince, yet he was a son of David's line, and they would bury him in David's sepulchre.

Let us picture to ourselves the scene at Jerusalem. There stands the Temple, with its costly stones and cedar beams, crowning the brow of Mount Moriah; and here the palace-home of the miserable Athaliah. From one of its gilded towers she watches, with fierce, conflicting passions the surging crowd and noisy tumult in the streets below. The people are thronging there, she knows, to see—perhaps to triumph over—the lifeless body of their king; to discuss with eager delight the downfall of the worshippers of Baal, and to set the crown of Ahaziah on the head of one of his sons. And as Athaliah looks down on the olive-shaded courtyards and secluded homes where these children dwell, she remembers, with a sharp pang of jealousy, that the moment one of these shall be crowned her own reign is over for ever. As with all Oriental sovereigns under age, the regency will pass to his mother's family, or to the men whose counsels have placed him on the throne; and so just as Athaliah had done for *her* son, another woman, perhaps a hated enemy and rival, shall do for hers, and the haughty daughter of Ahab shall be

cast out of her home a despised and helpless creature. But that she will never brook! No! let the hand of the assassin rather be called to her aid;—let these peaceful courts be deluged with royal blood, and let these helpless children die!—anything rather than that the sceptre of Judah be torn from her eager grasp! Hired murderers are quickly found—probably they have done such work for Athaliah before, and are ever ready at her command. The ruthless order—the secret signal, are quickly given; and when the shades of night have fallen over Jerusalem, the shining stars look down on a new sight of horror—of blood-stained marble—shrieking women, and dead or dying children. And then an awe-struck whisper runs through the throng of citizens, and they learn in breathless horror that David's royal line has perished, and the hated Athaliah is more firmly than ever seated on the throne. Do you find it difficult to believe that this woman could sin so deeply? —that she could sentence to a cruel death those innocent children who were her own flesh and blood—whose natural guardian she was? It is strange indeed, but it is true, and the history of all crime shows it to be possible. Remember that the foulest murderer was once a little innocent child, lisping his prayers, it may be, at a mother's knee, with no shadow of the scaffold on his open brow or in his smiling eyes. Ah! but as the years went on he forgot the hour of prayer—the house of God, and all that spoke to him of holiness and heaven. Then the heart grew hard—the conscience cold and dead—the life depraved. Strife and misery thickened around him—angry passions rose—the hour of darkness came; and then the hand was

stained with kindred blood, and the once innocent child died a felon's death! Oh! while you think of this dark picture, pray that your doom may never be his—and that He, who alone can, would 'keep your feet from falling, and your soul from sin!'

Let us leave the guilty queen to her hour of miserable triumph, and turn to watch the hallowed light that still glows within the Temple Courts—the light kept alive by God for His servant David's sake. At this midnight hour the high-priest JEHOIADA kneels in earnest supplication for the distracted kingdoms of Judah and Israel; while his gentle and pious wife JEHOSHEBA steals through the dark cloisters and narrow streets around the Temple, closely veiled, and fearful of detection, intent on a forlorn mission of mercy. She has heard of the fearful tragedy that has dyed the palace courts with the royal children's blood, and she would fain comfort the despairing mothers, or weep with them over their murdered little ones. She herself belongs to the royal race, the daughter of Jehoram and sister of Ahaziah, though very different in character from these godless monarchs. As she threads her way through scenes of grief and horror, her ear is caught by the low, wailing cry of infancy. It tells of life among these heaps of slain; and soon Jehosheba discovers the little JOASH, her brother's youngest child, lying half dead by the side of his terror-stricken nurse, and weltering in kindred gore. Fearful lest the assassins should return at his cry, she quickly hides him under her flowing robe, and motioning his nurse to follow, she hastens with this precious treasure back to her own safe and happy home. How gladly Jehoiada receives and

welcomes them! But where can they hide this feeble plant from Athaliah's withering rage? At last they fix upon a hiding-place;—it is a 'bed-chamber' belonging to one of the Courts of the Temple. But you must not think of some nice white-curtained room, with snowy pillows and soft couch of rest—light, airy, and cheerful, such as perhaps your own may be. No. The word is said to mean something quite different from that. The 'beds' mentioned in Scripture were only mats or long cushions, such as Orientals still use for sleeping on —things that could be easily rolled up and carried about; and for the numberless priests and Levites who ministered, by companies, in turn at Jerusalem, there must have been hundreds of these kept stowed away in some dark lumber-room, piled up from floor to roof, and forming thus an easy hiding-place in time of need.

In such a room as this the little Joash is carefully concealed. He and his nurse may steal out by night to the Temple Courts and breathe the cool sweet air, or enjoy the soft lustrous moonlight of those eastern climes, and by day he may sleep or play quietly among the rolls of matting. A strange hiding-place, indeed; and yet how safe it is! No hired assassins dare to penetrate these sacred courts—the glory of the Lord of Hosts overshadows it—the only sounds that break its stillness are those of prayer and praise. Does it not remind you of the hymn you have sung so often—

'Safe in the arms of Jesus,
Safe on His gentle breast.'

And now, for six long years the little prince has dwelt securely there. He knows no other home, and is well

pleased: but the beloved land of Judah lies desolate and afflicted. Athaliah still rules there with iron sway —the worship of Baal is everywhere established; and God's true Israel only cry to Him with fainting hearts, 'How long, O Lord, how long?'

But the time has come at last. Jehoiada, taught by the Spirit of the Lord, calls together all the faithful of the land—nobles and rulers—priests and Levites, and bringing forth to them the little Joash, now seven years old, he binds them in a solemn covenant to set this prince of David's line upon the throne of his fathers. The discovery of this long-hidden prince rekindles all their faith, courage, and zeal. They will free their land from the hated yoke of Athaliah, or they will perish in the attempt!

It is a strangely glad, yet solemn assembly, that meets next within the Temple Courts. The whole city is thronging there, and hundreds of armed men are ranged around and within the sacred walls. Even priests and Levites are bearing swords, prepared to fight for their king and their country. And now, when the great multitude behold their boy-king raised high on a pillar and upheld by Jehoiada and his sons—the crown of David lightly laid upon his childish brow, and read in his innocent face the hope of better days to come—their feelings of rapture and gratitude overcome them, and they raise one long, deep, echoing and re-echoing shout —'God save the king!'

The blare of trumpets tells that the ceremony of consecration is over: with psaltery and harp, cornet and lute, the many minstrels burst forth into songs of praise—the whole people join them in the glad,

triumphant melody, and then once more they raise that deafening shout—'God save the king!'

Ah! there is *one* listening to that shout with only feelings of revenge and rage! Suddenly a woman's voice is heard ringing out in shrill, fierce accents of despair—'Treason! treason!' And as they turn, they all behold the infuriated queen tearing her royal robes in her wrath and misery, and rushing wildly from a scene that only tells her too plainly that her power is gone—her kingdom lost to her for ever!

'Slay her not in the House of the Lord!' has been the constant and urgent command of Jehoiada, and even in this moment of excitement it is obeyed. Swift messengers of vengeance hasten after the unhappy Athaliah, and at the very gateway of her palace she is overtaken and ruthlessly slain—falling undefended and unmourned, even as her mother Jezebel had fallen! Little mercy she had shown to others;—little is now shown to her! So perished this bold ambitious woman—so passed away her wicked and idolatrous reign! 'All the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was quiet, after that they had slain Athaliah with the sword.'

No. X. THE HEBREW CAPTIVES.

WHAT mighty city is this—so vast in its extent—so dazzling in its splendour? Wide rivers sweep through it, bearing on their bosoms the ships of every nation, and the treasures of all lands are displayed in its glittering streets,—gold, silver, ivory, cedar-wood, pearls, and precious stones. These marble palaces that rise from out its leafy groves and blooming gardens are the homes of its merchant princes; and, on the level summits of these mighty walls that girdle it, their gay chariots pass and repass with ease! No wonder that kings and princes come from afar to gaze on the magnificence of this city: for this is BABYLON THE GREAT, the queen of all the cities in the world.

Those young lads seated under the willow-trees on the banks of yon silvery stream must have their eyes dazzled and their souls enchanted here, for they are fresh from the quiet hills of Judea, and quite new to a scene like this. They are captives, indeed, but then their captivity is of a most pleasant kind. It is the fancy of Nebuchadnezzar to keep such boys—chosen from the nobility of every kingdom he conquers—to ride in his processions and grace his festivals. They are richly fed and gaily clothed, trained in all the wisdom and learning of Chaldea, and indulged in all its

amusements and pleasures. Where, then, can they be more happy than in Babylon?

And yet to-day there is a cloud of sadness on each young brow. Are they thinking only of the green hills far away, and the homes that shall know them no more? It is a darker thought than that which troubles them, but, to understand, we must go back a little way.

These four youths belong to the nobility of Judah, being all kinsmen of Jehoiakim, one of the last native monarchs of that unhappy country. Fallen and sinful as Judah is, there are still many true Israelites there who mourn deeply over their degenerate race and country, and who long for the yet far-distant time 'foretold by prophets and by poets sung,' when Messiah shall come to make the 'wilderness blossom as the rose,' and 'to establish the kingdom of David in righteousness for ever.' Probably from parents such as these our poor Hebrew captives have sprung; in their names, at least, we find evidence that they loved and feared the name of Jehovah, for each is composed partly of one form of that Divine name—as, for instance, Dani*el*, or 'God is my Judge;' Hanani*ah*, or 'The Lord gave graciously; Micha*el*, 'Who is like God;' and Azari*ah*, 'The Lord helpeth.' By themselves, certainly, the names would signify little, for it is a common custom among the Hebrews to give such names to their children; but as we shall find them, in this instance, accompanied by habits of piety and virtue—by lives of prayer, faith, and obedience, we are encouraged to believe that they were given in no spirit of cold formality, but were the devout expressions of faithful parents, who, seeing evil days at hand, gave their

children early to the Lord, and sought to train them in His fear and love and service. And thus it has come to pass that these captive boys have brought with them into the land of exile treasures greater and more enduring than any that the mighty Babylon can show!

How harshly sound in their ears the heathen names with which their conquerors have replaced the dear familiar ones of childhood and home! Bel-teshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego—words meaning 'servants of Bel,' or some other Chaldee idol. But they are otherwise kindly treated by them, and have already won much favour in the eyes of their keepers—just as their great ancestor Joseph did, long ago, in Egypt. Daniel, at least, is regarded with 'tender love' by the Chaldee prince who is set over these keepers, and by the *Melzar* or steward under him. They would do anything reasonable to make their captivity pleasant to these amiable, gentle-mannered youths; but there is one law which they will not help them to evade any longer. It seems no hardship to these Chaldee officials—rather, indeed, a privilege; and they have been annoyed and perplexed beyond measure to find these usually docile prisoners making such a great difficulty about this. For they are sitting now on the banks of the river, dismal and dejected, plotting rebellion even, and all, forsooth, because it is the king's command that these pages in training for his service shall, in the meantime, be nourished with royal dainties from his own table, in order to make them grow tall, and strong, and handsome.

This is a strange thing to object to, the Melzar thinks, and he has little sympathy with this fit of dis-

obedience. Why, only to think of the rich savoury dishes served on golden platters, and the silver goblets filled with gleaming purple wine; and the luxurious fruits and tempting sweetmeats that are carried away from the royal table to feed these boys; and then to hear them sighing for the tasteless pottage and the miserable barley-cakes of their own poor country! What utter folly and ingratitude. This is the Melzar's way of looking at it: but let us look from another point of view. These four lads have been long enough in Babylon to learn some of its customs; and they know that into yon gorgeous temple, in the midst of the city some of every dish that graces the royal table every day is carried, and there *the whole* is solemnly consecrated to the great, senseless, sightless image of gold that occupies the centre of the building. It is the image of BEL, the chief idol of the Chaldees.

The Hebrew captives are not asked to join in any such service. With wonderful clemency Nebuchadnezzar permits them to absent themselves from all heathen rites and ceremonies at present, and to worship according to their own fashion in the seclusion of their rooms. And there, three times a day, with windows wide open towards their beloved Jerusalem, they meet to pray to Him who has promised 'to hear the cry of the captive when he shall stretch forth his hands unto the holy place—to hear in heaven and to maintain his cause.'

There is not even a synagogue in all Babylon where these youths can meet with other worshippers like-minded with themselves. There are only these four to gather in the name of the Lord; but 'where two or

three are met together in His name, there will He be in the midst of them to bless them and to do them good,' and this little, homely service helps to refresh and quicken the spiritual life that would else wither away and perish on the burning plains of Babylon. Think of this, any of you who are beginning to 'forsake the assembling of yourselves together' in this land favoured with many churches and quiet Sabbaths. Ask your own hearts if you are sure to meet the hour of trial that may come—nay! that must come for you, as bravely as those Hebrew boys met theirs! They kept their armour bright. The shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit were theirs in the day of battle; but may not *you* be left to meet the enemy of your souls unarmed and unaided?

And now why do they sit dejectedly on the river bank? It is because one sentence of the law of their God is ringing in their ears—'The soul that sinneth it shall die.' And they know that for an Israelite to eat food offered to idols is deadly sin. It is to become himself an idolater and to have his name blotted out for ever from the Book of Life! Do not think that they are still pondering in their hearts whether to eat or to refuse—whether to sin or die. That question was settled long ago, or rather it never rose at all! Daniel, at least, has always 'purposed in his heart not to defile himself with the king's meat;' and as the leader of their little band, his influence is given to aid every good purpose and high resolve in the minds of his young comrades. They are ready then for the approaching crisis—ready for the quiet but firm refusal—ready, if need be, for the doom of rebels! Yes, but they are

young and strong, and full of great projects for the future; it is hard to die so early without one dream of youth fulfilled—one blow struck in the cause of freedom and truth. It is bitter to part with the life and light and hope that gild even a captive's lot!

And so, poor boys, they are earnestly seeking in their own minds some way of deliverance, just as you would have done in their place. Already Daniel has informed the chief officer of their difficulty, and besought him for permission to abstain from the royal dainties; but, kindly disposed as that great man is, he will not or dare not grant this request. 'I fear my lord the king,' he had said. 'He will see you pale and meagre and weakly—quite unlike the other youths who are being trained along with you. He will be angry, and my head may be in danger.'

But now Daniel bethinks him of another plan; and while he discloses it to his three companions, see, there is the kindly Melzar coming along the river bank. He stays to speak a little with his favourite prisoners—to chide their sadness, and to try once more to coax them to obey. He is startled by the bold request they make to him. 'Prove us for ten days,' they say, 'let us still eat only the simple pottage of lentils, and still drink only water from the fountain. Only for ten days let it be tried, and then bring us face to face with the rest of our fellow-captives who are fed on the food from the royal table. All you want is—you say so yourselves—that we should look well and strong and vigorous. Well, if it is the will of our God to save us alive, He can give us health and strength by any food; and if He wills not, then we can but die!'

The Melzar doubts and demurs a while; but the boys urge him to consent. 'It may be the last favour he can grant them, and it is doing no wrong, no harm to any one. Only let this ten days fast be tried, and, oh, how grateful they will be to him! They will entreat the God of Israel to give him some special blessing.'

And the kindly steward yields at last. The ten days' trial is made—the basin of pottage and the cruse of water are duly set, while the dainties of Babylon are untasted. We cannot doubt that from the quiet room, with the windows open to Jersualem, the prayers of the captives rise very often—nor can we doubt that these prayers are heard in heaven.

Fairer and better by far than all the other lads under his care, the Chaldee officer finds these four Hebrew boys. The flush of health is on their cheek—their step is vigorous and elastic—their eyes sparkle with intelligence. And I think as the good Melzar hears them praised for their handsome appearance and their marvellous knowledge and wisdom, he feels a glow of satisfaction that he never felt before—proud of his own share in their success, and very hopeful that the blessing they spoke of would yet come to him from the God of Israel. Let us hope so, too, and that he is soon to learn from these youths the way of everlasting life.

And are the trials of the Hebrew captives over now? Oh, no, no! There is in the far future a fierce, glowing furnace which some of them must brave; there is a den of lions where one alone must stand. What human heart would not quail before these? But where human strength fails, a Divine arm can uphold; and already this victory over one temptation has made the lads

stronger and braver for all the days to come. The lions' mouths shall be shut; they shall not harm the 'man greatly beloved;' and in the lurid glow of that fiery furnace shall be seen, walking with His safe and unharmed martyrs, 'One like unto the Son of God!'

And then, when all earthly trials and troubles are ended, each faithful servant shall hear the voice of the Master saying—'Go thou thy way, till the end be; for thou shalt rest and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.'

'They met the tyrant's brandished steel,
The lion's gory mane;
They bowed their heads the death to feel,
Who follows in their train?'

No. XI. THE LITTLE SYRIAN MAID.

MORE than three thousand years ago, Eliezer, a youth of Damascus, left the palm shadows and the white walls of his native city, to enter on the service of his master, Abraham. That city is standing to-day—the oldest and almost the most interesting of all the cities in the world. Mighty empires have risen and fallen—countless generations have lived and died since then—but Damascus still stands to tell us of many a Bible scene and story. Here dwelt the good and gentle disciple Ananias, in 'the street called Straight,' and within sight of these venerable gates the reckless Saul of Tarsus was so marvellously changed by 'that JESUS whom he persecuted.'

As beautiful to-day Damascus seems to be as when Mahomet, the false prophet—then only a simple camel-driver—stood gazing on it with rapture, and, turning suddenly away, refused to enter, saying with characteristic quaintness, 'Man can have but one paradise, and mine is fixed above.' The most eloquent traveller of the present day (the late Dean Stanley) thus describes it: 'Far and near in front extends the level plain, and in its midst lies, at our feet, a vast lake, or island, of deep verdure—walnuts and apricots waving above—corn and grass below, and in the centre of this mass of foliage rises, striking out its white arms of streets hither and

thither, and its white minarets above the trees which embosom them—the city of Damascus; while, on the right, the snowy heights of Hermon overlook the whole scene.'

Interesting as other memories of this ancient town might be, we must turn now to look at one little scene occurring—perhaps not within its walls, yet, in all likelihood, about or near them, to repeat a story which all children love to learn, and all grown-up people to look back upon—the story of 'The Little Captive Maid.'

Benhadad, the king of Syria, reigns in peaceful security, surrounded by the brave men and victorious armies that have won him riches and honour on many a hard fought battle-field. And yet he is but a poor man; for with all his greatness he knows not Him 'from whom all blessings flow;' and it is only in the house of RIMMON—some hideous idol, doubtless—that he kneels at times to return thanks for past victory or to ask for more.

The most distinguished generals and officers of Benhadad's armies have their dwellings near the royal palace; and the most highly favoured of these courtiers is NAAMAN, a brave and skilful warrior, and a man of worth and fidelity. What splendour surrounds this veteran soldier, now that his laurels are won and his sword sheathed in peace! A stately mansion—gay chariots and swift horses—long retinues of servants and followers—gold, gems, and precious things unnumbered —all are his. Surely this man is happy!

And yet, look at NAAMAN, skulking along by night through this silent colonnade, afraid to be seen even by

the humblest of his followers! What weight of misery is this that makes the once fearless soldier start at his own shadow and tremble at a passing footstep? But stay! As the rising moon shines on him more clearly, we can understand it all. That wasted form and haggard face—those loathsome wounds and hideous scars —the crumbling features and decaying members—all tell their own sad story—NAAMAN *is a leper.*

It is difficult for us to understand the awful horror inspired by the sight or feeling of leprosy. The form of that disease mentioned in Scripture is unknown in our day and country: thank God it is so! But we can think what that malady must have been that drove the Israelite of old forth from his busy life and happy home, away to the lonely desert to dwell among wild beasts and birds of prey, never more to hear the dear voices of wife and children, or to look on the kindly face of a friend. We can imagine something of the misery he felt when some chance traveller's approach compelled him to turn hastily away, hiding his deep-scarred face in sackcloth, and to cry out in bitterness of soul, 'Unclean! unclean!'

But Naaman is not an Israelite—only a poor heathen idolater—and so leprosy is no type of sin to him, and no holy law compels him to leave the city of his habitation. Only the natural craving for solitude and seclusion that belongs to this unhappy malady is his to the full. Of what use to him now are all the gold and gems, the trophies and spoils with which his royal master has loaded him? He only asks to be left to die in silence, or to grapple with his misery alone.

All the household keeps aloof from him in hopeless

terror and dejection, for there lives no wise man nor physician who can cure this deadly disease, or even lesson its agony. Only one sad visitant they now await with trembling awe—the only one who can lay his hand upon the sufferer and give him peace, and that one is—Death.

But let us look now into this shady court-yard, where marble fountains cast up their jets of cool and sparkling waters, and leafy fig-trees spread their fruitful boughs. Here are some Syrian women seated on the ground, plying distaffs and needles with nimble fingers and wondrous skill, and near them crouches a little Hebrew slave watching with eager eyes the brilliant colours and the rich embroidery that seems to grow beneath their touch. She is only a child—a slender dark-eyed girl of eight or nine years—and no harder task is given her than to run errands for her mistress, or for these Syrian fellow-servants around her. She has been kindly treated in this land of strangers, and is full of kindly feeling for the great house that has been her home for a while, and of ready sympathy too with the great sorrow that shadows it so darkly now; but her childish memory goes back at times to a home very different from this—a lowly cottage among the green hills of Israel, where brothers and sisters used to play with her among the orchard trees, and where their gentle mother taught them oftentimes of Israel's God, and where they all joined together at eventide in singing the sweet psalms of their great king, David. Sometimes it would be—'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want;' and sometimes,—'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble;' or, 'I will lift

up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.' These recollections often make the little girl's heart grow sad, and her eyes fill with tears.

'Are they singing these psalms to-night at home?' she wonders, 'and do they miss me there? I cannot tell.' And then, the light heart of childhood shakes off its sadness, and she whispers to herself, 'Jehovah is still my Shepherd;' and indeed He has 'spread a table for me here in the presence of mine enemies;' and even though I may never see mother and home again, I know 'that goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.'

And now the Syrian women pause in their many tasks; the low hum of their voices, their story-telling and chaunting, has ceased, and they glance mournfully from one to another, or bend their heads in token of grief, for that long, low sound that they know so well, comes wearily from their master's rooms, saddening all the sweet summer air, and telling of new agonies endured. They are all silent and subdued; all but the little Hebrew captive. And *her* eyes are now sparkling with new light, and her lips are quivering as with some suppressed secret—for one half-forgotten glory of her fatherland has suddenly been recalled to mind—the mighty miracles done in Israel by Elisha, the servant of the LORD. And surely she thinks the prophet still lives —still loves to heal the sick; and her master Naaman is so sorely afflicted, and he is so good and kind, though he be not a son of Abraham. And oh! the wish *must* be spoken even if they should chide her, or only laugh her to scorn—'*Would God my lord were with the prophet*

that is in Samaria, for he would recover him of his leprosy.'

How the clear childish voice has startled them! Can there be any truth in what she says? But no, no! it is only a foolish fancy of the little slave's! Why think of such idle words at all? Yet, strangely enough, the 'idle words' are repeated from one to another, from the lower to the upper servants, from these to the master's and mistress' ears, and so on and on till even through the palace of Benhadad these winged words are floating. 'The prophet that is in Samaria,'—everybody is talking about him, and asking who he is: 'He would recover him of his leprosy.' Can there be even some faint chance of this?

Drowning men catch at straws; and if this be but a straw, yet Naaman is worse than drowning, and he seizes on it eagerly. His royal master, too, encourages him in the hope, and soon urges his departure for the land of Israel.

Here already the story of the little maiden ends. The Bible tells us no more about her. We love to picture to ourselves the long, richly-caparisoned train of horsemen and chariots, mules and camels, that left the white walls and towers of Damascus one morning, but we do not know if she was among them, with her bright eyes and eager face, to point out the wooded heights of Lebanon, the blue waters of Galilee glancing in the sunlight, and the green hills of Samaria, as they came one by one in sight; and we can see the proud General stand watching by the Prophet's door, receiving only the simple message, 'Go, wash in Jordan and be clean.' What, that narrow troubled stream of Jordan!

Has he left the broad rivers of Abana and Pharpar only to come to this! And then, with the helpless, childish anger of a sick man, he turns to go home again. This last mad hope has failed! But we do not know if *she* was one of the faithful servants who urged him so tenderly to fulfil the task, calling him—'My father!' and humouring him as we might humour a fretful child.

How glad they must have been that their efforts prevailed, and that Naaman went humbly to the Jordan valley at last, and laved himself with its brown waters! For lo! the act of faith and obedience is quickly crowned, and the wasting flesh of the leper becomes pure and wholesome again, 'even as the flesh of a little child.' And with what reverent care they would lade the two mules with their burden of earth from Israel's holy fields, while Naaman uttered his fervent vow that on that sacred earth he would thenceforth worship Jehovah, the true God, and Him only!

It may be that the little Hebrew maid was taken back again to that cottage-home in Israel that she had loved and remembered so well. That for a time at least the mother's arms might be round her, and the father's hand might stroke her long dark hair; that brothers and sisters, gathered once more round the old olive tree, or in the vine-shaded porch at eventide, sang with her again the glorious psalms of David. Very likely it was so. Yet this is only fancy. Let us rather keep in our memories what the Bible tells us about her;—that, in the far land of her sojourn, she did what she could to be kind and good and grateful to all around her; that, knowing the blessings and privileges belonging

to the people of God, she eagerly sought to make others sharers in them.

Do you wish to follow her example? You are going out into a world where you will find—no worshippers of Rimmon, indeed—none, perhaps, that do not know a Saviour's name, but many, oh, how many! who never try to serve or follow Him—stricken with the leprosy of sin, yet never seeking to be made whole. And then, especially in their times of sickness and sorrow, if you are Christian children, it will be your duty and privilege to tell them—with all earnestness, yet modestly and quietly, just as the little Hebrew girl told *her* good news long ago—that there is 'balm in Gilead, and a physician there;' that there is One waiting to bless them—One able and willing to make them pure and holy and happy now and for ever; that in the words of the beautiful hymn—

'There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Emmanuel's veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.'

No. XII. JOHN THE BAPTIST.

'THE Children of the Bible'—they have been our companions now for some Sunday evenings; and I trust that what has been pleasant for me to write has not always been uninteresting nor unprofitable for you to read. We have been, together, recalling the long-gone days of childhood spent not far from Eden's gates, and the years of youth that were lived when the world was young And these old-world youths and maidens have passed one by one in review before us—the froward Ishmael or the gentle Isaac—the holy child of Shiloh,—the Captive Maid,—the dying Prince of Tirzah. Do not forget them, nor the lessons we have learned from them; but seek to live so that the years to come may yet witness for you that, like Isaac, you are meekly doing your Father's will—like Samuel, abiding in His presence, and, like Daniel, keeping yourselves unspotted from the world. We must now leave the children of Old Testament history. After the seventy years captivity in Babylon we come to a long period of 500 years, only slightly traced out by the sacred writers. No quiet pictures of home life and happy childhood meet us there; only the gloomy shadows of revolution and anarchy—strife and bloodshed. The Jews did, indeed, return to their native

land, and built once more the walls of their beloved Zion; but it seemed as if 'the glory had departed' from the sacred place; the Ark of the Covenant, with its wondrous treasures—and the Shechinah itself—all were gone!

Old men who remembered the first Temple wept as they gazed on the new; its lights were often quenched; its praises rudely silenced by heathen conquerors or profane soldiery.

Still the voices of the prophets rang out at times like clarion's sound upon the nation's ear. Haggai and Malachi spoke boldly of the brighter day that was yet to dawn, when all the darkness of that troubled night should be past. The new Temple, they predicted, should yet shine with a glory which the old had never known; for 'the Lord whom they sought should suddenly appear' in its courts, and there 'the Desire of all nations should come.'

That word was fulfilled, for it was the Word of God, and could not fail. The time came when the second Temple was rebuilt, with great magnificence, by Herod; with costly stones and precious metals, but a glory far more excellent hovered over the sacred courts on that day, when the aged Simeon took Mary's Infant in his trembling arms and said—'Mine eyes have seen thy Salvation!'

But I would have you watch one earlier streak of that bright dawning—I would have you welcome the herald who announces the coming of the King of kings. And so let us stand to-day on the green slope of this Judean hillside, looking down on the peaceful home of Zacharias—a good old man, a blameless priest of Israel.

There is unwonted stir and bustle in the usually quiet and orderly dwelling, for neighbours and kinsfolk have gathered there to rejoice with its inmates over a blessing long withheld, but at last bestowed. A child's voice is heard for the first time there, and the very anxiety it wakens brings a new flush of life to Elisabeth's faded cheek; a new hope and promise to the whole household: and to-day the boy is to be dedicated to the Lord, and to have his name given to him. These kindly neighbours and cousins are very anxious to have that matter rightly settled, for some strange notion has got into the mother's head that he is to be called 'John,' and that, they declare, is a name never heard of in the family before; it seems to them a very unsuitable one—why not call the child after his good old father, Zacharias?

And so, by degrees, they get up quite a little turmoil about this question, which, after all, does not concern *them* in particular. And all the while the good old priest sits apart in quiet meditation; he speaks to no one, and if he notices what goes on, it is in silence.

But you know well the reason of his silence. You remember how the angel told him of this very day, and how he could not believe that his aged eyes should yet see his child playing in his quiet home; and how, not in angry punishment, but as a gently reproving sign, the power of speech was taken from him for a time. Only for a time, however, and now, when the excited relatives come round him with that vexed question about the boy's name, and when, beckoning for his waxed tablets and iron pencil, he writes boldly and strongly the very words that the angel had said: 'His name is

John,'—*then*, while the eager friends fall back baffled and perplexed, the long-locked lips are opened at last—the full heart pours forth its gratitude, and all around him listen with reverence to a strain of rapture and of holy triumph such as they can hardly understand. Oh! do not think it was only common earthly joy that Zacharias felt in that solemn moment. His life was nearly over—he was soon to sever from all human ties. It mattered little to him that for a few brief months, or even years, the old home might seem brighter than in years gone bye! The well-spring of his joy was this: that in the feeble, wailing infant it was given him to recognise the forerunner of the long-looked for Messiah; he knew that the world's night of sorrow was now nearly over, and that the dayspring from on high was at hand. 'And thou, child, shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest, for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways.'

It was no softly nurtured childhood—no youth of indulgence and pleasure that lay before this boy. Into the wild deserts, rudely clad and scantly fared, he was early sent to learn how to 'endure hardness;' and to be trained by the Spirit of the LORD for a life of fervent ministry and utter self-denial, crowned only with the blood-stained crown of martyrdom! Yet his was a destiny nobler and better far than that of kings and conquerors of earth. And surely he was worthy of his great office — for of him CHRIST himself has said: 'There hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist;' —only, while we think of his greatness, do not let us forget that its chief element—its distinguishing feature—was this, that he could point to ANOTHER and say—

'Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world!'

And now the scene is changed. No longer the lonely hills of Judea bound our view. For the blessing long confined to the chosen race is now to be shed freely over a waiting world. 'The beam that shines from Zion's hill' begins 'to lighten every land.' Far away over boundless plains of richest verdure, culture, and fertility our eyes wander, finding, at every glance, some new scene of wonder and beauty. It is a landscape lovely as a dream of fairy-land—swept by wide rivers—shadowed by myrtle and orange-groves, and studded by stately palaces and glittering cities. Here the world's wealthiest kings and princes have, for ages, displayed their matchless magnificence and luxury; and here the world's wisest sages have gathered their strange and mysterious lore. Little wonder it was that Persian magi turned so often to the bright skies above them, shining with a glory all unknown to our northern climes. They read, there, in those burning characters, something of Him 'who made the stars also.' And though their learning was, indeed, largely mixed with human error and folly, yet it pleased God to reward their long ages of patient watching and research by one ray of truth that was destined to shed its glory through all lands and ages. Look at the little band of pilgrims leaving this fair eastern land and journeying steadily westward, through many a burning day and many a silent night. Onward—onward, not knowing whither the slow-footed camels may yet carry them; not knowing whom they go to seek, only knowing that a wondrous Stranger has been born into the world, and that they

'have seen His star in the east,' and must go 'to worship Him.'

O noble pilgrims! You are leaving home and friends—wealth and honour—all that the world holds dear—to kneel at the feet of One born in poverty—cradled in a manger; who, as the years go on shall have no home to call His own, and who shall be laid at last in a borrowed grave. And yet the light that leads you is a light from heaven; and in the far-off ages a countless multitude, taught by your bright example, shall yet follow in your steps, and learn to call you blessed!

In the great cathedral at Cologne there is a costly shrine richly decked with gold and pearls and gems. Three dry and withered skulls are lying there; covered with gold-cloth and crusted with jewels. Lights burn continually before them—incense rises in fragrant clouds around them. All honour is paid to these strange relics, for they are said to be the heads of the great eastern Magi—Kaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar (such are the names which tradition has assigned them); but it is probably only an idle legend that connects these jewelled skulls with the kingly strangers; and, at all events, how poor and pitiful would the glittering baubles round the shrine appear to those pure souls who came to pour far greater treasures at the Saviour's feet, and who, long ago, have followed Him into the glories of the Heavenly City!

And now 'let us,' too, 'go even unto Bethlehem.' Let us kneel with simple shepherds, and with eastern sages, at the feet of our Infant Redeemer. We cannot

offer to Him gold, frankincense, or myrrh; but we can yield Him our love, our gratitude, our obedience; and these are the treasures He would wish us to bring.

And since I must bid you good-bye, I feel sure that it is best to leave you *here*—here, with the only pattern of perfect childhood before you—here with the angel's song still ringing in your ears—'Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and goodwill toward men.'

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